



CALIFORNIA'S  
VALUED TRUST

Healthcare Benefits for the Education Community

This document is part of California's Valued Trust (CVT) educational series

**Be Informed. Be Involved.**

*Know your health care choices.*

This informational series is a resource to help you get good quality health care. For more resources, visit our Web site at [www.cvtrust.org/resources/beinformedbeinvolved](http://www.cvtrust.org/resources/beinformedbeinvolved).

## Getting the care that is known to work best is part of *good quality care*

Each patient is different, but scientific research on patient care has shown that some types of care tend to get better results than others. When there is medical evidence from research that tells what care works best for your condition, then using that evidence is part of “good quality” care.

### But doesn't everyone get the care that works best?

No. Many scientific studies of patient care have shown that patients do not always get the care that is known to work the best for their condition. For example, an article in the *New England Journal of Medicine* tells how researchers recently studied the health care received by children in 12 communities in the United States over a four-year period [<http://content.nejm.org/cgi/content/full/357/15/1515>]. Most of the children were from middle-income families with health insurance.

Researchers interviewed the parents and reviewed the children's medical records. When they checked to see whether the care the children had been given met nationally accepted standards for good quality care, they found that *often it did not*. Here are examples:

- Only 19% of seriously ill infants with fevers had the right lab tests done.
- Only about 46% of children with asthma were on the right medications.
- Only 31% of children ages 3-6 had their weight measured at checkups.



For more about how patient care has been studied and the quality problems that have been found, look for the following tip sheet at CVT's Web site [www.cvtrust.org/resources/beinformedbeinvolved](http://www.cvtrust.org/resources/beinformedbeinvolved): "Good quality health care: What it is and why you can't take it for granted."

## What can **you** do to help make sure you are getting the care that works best?

### 1 You can ask

When your doctor or other health provider recommends a particular treatment, ask what research has been done on that treatment and what the research results might mean for you. You can also ask whether there are other choices to consider, and whether research has been done to find out which treatment works best.

Research studies can be complicated and hard to explain. If you ask about research and the answer you get is too technical, you can say, "*would you please tell me that again using different words?*"

### 2 You can look for more information on your own

Websites can be a great way to find information that tells about specific health conditions and which types of tests and treatments tend to work the best. The internet has thousands of websites that give health information and opinions, but *many are not trustworthy*. To find reliable and up-to-date information that is based on solid medical research, you must choose your websites carefully.

When you find health information on your own, you may want to bring it to a medical visit to discuss with your doctor or other health provider.



Look for these tip sheets at CVT's Web site [www.cvtrust.org/resources/beinformedbeinvolved](http://www.cvtrust.org/resources/beinformedbeinvolved):

- "How do we know what types of health care work best?"
- "Information about health care quality: What it is and where to find it."

- “Finding health information on the internet: Tips for knowing which websites to trust.”
- “A list of recommended websites that have trustworthy health information.”

## Getting the care that works best is good for your health and makes wise use of resources

When there is a particular treatment that research has shown to work best for your condition, it makes good sense to use it – good sense for your health and good sense for wise use of time and money spent on health care.

---

“When I injured my back, my doctor went over the research on different treatments and how well they work. For my kind of injury, the research said that physical therapy and medication usually work just as well or better than surgery.

I was happy to hear it. I didn’t want a back operation unless I really needed it. It takes so long to recover plus, with any operation, there’s always some risk.

If I had needed the surgery, my insurance would have covered it and that’s good to know. But then, even if I’m not paying, why waste money on a treatment that costs more and doesn’t work any better?”

---

*Did you know that . . .*

you can’t judge the quality of your care by how much it costs

- **The best type of treatment for your condition might cost less than other types of care that don’t work as well.** Sometimes good quality care does cost more, but often it does not. And just because care costs a lot does not make it good quality care.
- **Keep in mind that the cost of getting poor quality care can be very high** – sometimes far higher than the cost of getting good quality care.
  - For example, suppose that instead of getting the treatment that works best, you are given a different treatment that doesn’t work very well. Since the treatment doesn’t work very well, your health problem might get worse. In the end, the problem might cost much more to treat.

- When mistakes are made in medical care, the cost of extra care that is needed to fix a medical mistake can be very expensive.
- Also, poor care includes being given care that you don't really need, and the cost of unnecessary tests and treatment can be very high.

Source: These materials were adapted from the *Communication Toolkit: Using information to get high quality care*. The American Institutes for Research developed the Toolkit materials with funding from the California HealthCare Foundation. The National Business Group on Health maintains and host the Toolkit website.